

GAO: BUSH'S FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE LACKS SAFEGUARDS AGAINST RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Monday, 17 July 2006

Study Released By Reps. Stark & Miller Also Shows Lack of Accountability for Results.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Tuesday, July 18, 2006

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GAO FINDS THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE LACKS SAFEGUARDS AGAINST RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Study Released By Reps. Stark & Miller Also Shows Lack of Accountability for Results

WASHINGTON,
D.C. - A new Government Accountability Office report released today by U.S. Representatives Pete Stark (D-CA) and George Miller (D-CA) finds that the Bush Administration offers inadequate safeguards against discrimination in federally funded social services programs carried out by faith-based organizations.

The GAO also found that the White House has no way of knowing if its faith-based initiative is actually achieving its goals. Though the initiative resulted in the awarding of more than \$2.1 billion in federal grants to faith-based organizations in fiscal year 2005 alone, the GAO found that few measurable standards have been developed or implemented to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

"This report shows that the Bush administration has sent billions of taxpayer dollars to religious organizations without accountability for how that money is spent," said Stark, the senior Democrat on the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee. "The Bush administration has failed to develop standards to verify that faith-based organizations aren't using federal funds to pay for inherently religious activity or to provide services on the basis of religion. Taxpayers shouldn't have to take it on faith that programs without standards for success are having a measurable impact."

"Faith-based organizations provide important services in communities across our country - that is not in doubt. What's in question is how

the Bush administration manages the federal government's role in funding faith-based groups. The Bush Administration has a responsibility to make sure that federal taxpayer dollars are not being sent to organizations that discriminate, but it is failing to uphold that responsibility," said Miller, the senior Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee. "As a result, we don't know if Americans who are eligible for services are missing out on them because of their religious beliefs. This has been a glaring problem from the beginning of this initiative and it must be corrected."

Serious failures to prevent discrimination

The GAO report found that federal agencies administering the faith-based initiative are not informing religious organizations of their anti-discrimination responsibilities under the law. Every organization that receives and uses federal grants to provide community services must provide those services to anyone who is eligible, regardless of factors like race or religion. For example, an afterschool program that receives federal funding may not refuse to accept an eligible student because of his or her religion. Yet in 60 percent of cases the GAO examined, federal agencies failed to provide to faith-based organizations a statement on nondiscrimination in program participation.

The GAO report also found that 70 percent of the agencies it reviewed did not provide information on permissible hiring practices to grantees. Audits conducted by federal agencies of faith-based grantees, however, routinely fail to monitor whether grantees are adhering to equal treatment regulations.

No assessment of whether initiative is achieving its goals

When President Bush discussed the launch of the initiative in November of 2001, he said: "We ought to ask the question: Does the program work? If faith is the integral part of a program being successful, the government ought to say hallelujah. We ought to welcome the good work of faith in our society." Yet five years into the initiative, the GAO report finds that the government has not examined whether programs administered by religious organizations are improving participant outcomes.

According to the study, agencies have not completed - or even begun - outcome-based evaluations of most of the faith-based programs they fund. Only one federal agency, the U.S. Department of Education, is planning to conduct a comparative analysis to examine whether participants of programs run by faith-based groups have better outcomes than do participants of programs run by secular organizations.

"When President Bush said faith-based programs should be evaluated, I agreed. That's why I was disappointed to learn that his Administration is conducting almost no oversight of the faith-based initiative. Rather

than embrace accountability, government agencies are resisting GAO recommendations to improve performance. The Bush Administration should practice what it preaches," concluded Stark.

The GAO report is available at

http://www.house.gov/stark/news/109th/pressreleases/GAO_faith.pdf